

# I Love You, Scotty

Elsye Mahern

IF I OPENED my eyes as wide as I could and wrinkled my forehead, I could look at the dog through my bangs. Whenever I could do that, I knew it wouldn't be long before Mother sent me to the barber with two dimes tied in the corner of my handkerchief, and I'd have to tell him, "Just to the tip of my ear, please." He'd cut my bangs too, and then for a while I couldn't look at things through them. Everything looked different, and better somehow, when I looked through my bangs. Everything looked enchanting, but I had to be careful not to say so.

Once just after I'd been given the dog—I can't remember who gave him to me—I said, "That dog simply reeks class!" Mother heard me and she pointed her face at the ceiling and laughed. "Reeks," she said and laughed some more. I don't know why she pointed her face at the ceiling and I wished that she wouldn't do it. She did the same thing when she coughed, only it was worse. When she coughed her face and her throat were like one thing, the throat long, and the cheeks flat, and the mouth open and the lips out. It made me think of some kind of animal—like a wolf, maybe.

By the time she stopped laughing, I knew the word reeks was spoiled. I couldn't be happy anymore even thinking the word. I'd been happy saying, "That dog simply reeks class!" It was true. He was a real Scotty, and that wasn't just an ordinary dog. But mostly I'd been happy saying it because it sounded like something someone in the movies would say.

I went to the movies almost every Sunday afternoon, so I knew how real people are supposed to be. In the movies, people looked at each other and talked to each other. In the movies, children came home from school laughing, and their mother laughed and fixed them sugar bread, and took them shopping, and they bought a red coat or patent leather shoes, which came up high in back, and had five straps in front which buttoned on the side with five shiny black buttons, with a little, pointy, silver thing in the center of each button. Or their parents tucked them in bed, and wound up a music box which played tinkly music, while they snuggled under soft covers.

But we weren't like anybody in the movies. Once I came in from school and said, "My face hurts." Daddy was sitting on the register playing his ukelele. "You think it hurts you," he said, "what about us—we have to look at it." It hurt mostly when the wind blew. Sometimes in the winter it hurt softly, all the time—not like the hurt in my side, from running—but just easy. Then when the wind blew,

or the sun on the snow made red dots in my eyes, it hurt bad.

Daddy was a car-knocker on the Big Four Railroad. He worked the second trick, and I couldn't go to bed until mother called him at 10:30. When he got out of the bed, I got into it and tried to go to sleep right away, because I didn't like the way the bed smelled. When I was littler, I'd just crawled over him and slept next to the wall. But no matter how still I tried to be, I wiggled too much. So I had to wait until he got out of the bed.

Mother sat at the dining room table, painting a picture or doing a cross-word puzzle. "Alma!" My eyes flew open and I sat up straight. But it was like someone was inside of me, pulling me in and down, and I sank into the softness. "Alma, don't you go to sleep there!" My eyes flew open again and I tried to look at the Wallpaper—at the shiny stripe beside the dull stripe, with the flowers twining up between them. But the room wouldn't stay there long.

Once when she called me to go to bed, I got up and got the funny paper and squatted on the register to read it. They laughed at me and the sound woke me up. I didn't like to wake up to the sound of people laughing at me.

You can see that we weren't anything like people in the movies—we weren't like real people at all, and that's why I wanted the dog. Well, I didn't really want it—but I knew that you were supposed to want a dog, and I thought that I could, maybe, practice wanting it.

It helped some to look at Scotty through my bangs. They made everything break up into separate little rooms, and when I looked at Scotty all the rooms were black. His hair was stiff and like it was going to be curly, but it ended too soon. And it was like somebody burned it, on the end, with a curling iron which was too hot. And every once in a while, one of his hairs was gray. I don't know how old he was. Maybe he was too old to act like a real dog. Or maybe it was us. But he didn't act like a real dog at all.

I put my arm around him and put my face against his body. "I love you," I said. But it didn't sound right, because I couldn't say it very loud, because I didn't want to have that spoiled, too. He didn't move. He just stood there and made a kind of grinding noise when he breathed. I didn't know what to do after that, so I went out and sat on the step, and bet myself that a model T would come by before a model A.

Scotty never jumped around, or wagged his tail, or acted like he was happy. But mostly, he wouldn't follow me. I wished I had a leash, so I could take him walking. But at least, I thought, he could have followed me. There was a field right beside our house. And I could have walked in the field with him at my heels. That's what Katherine Hepburn would have done.

I wanted to put my face against him again and say, "I love you," because I would never get to be a real person if I didn't practice, but



then I remembered that he just stood there making that grinding noise, and it seemed that anyone, even a dog, should do more than that when you say those words.

One Sunday afternoon, I started to the show. I only got four or five houses down the road, when a car drove past and stopped in front of me. A man got out and he looked kind of scared. He forgot to close the car door. He started walking back past me.

I turned around. Scotty was laying in the middle of the road. I started to run to him, but the man grabbed my arm. "Better not touch him," he said. Scotty's front legs jerked and his head moved back a little.

"He's *my* dog," I said—and he was. He'd been trying to follow me.

Mrs. Pence came out of her house, and the man stood with his hands on his hips, looking down at my dog. Scotty's mouth looked pale pink. I don't know if it always looked that way or if being hit by the car made it like that.

He didn't move anymore after that one time. Mrs. Pence put her arms around me, and it was like going into a warm, sweet-smelling room. "He was her dog," she said, "her beloved dog." Then I began to cry—because I was real. He was my dog, and he'd been killed. But he was a real dog, and I was a real girl.

Sometimes, after that, when Daddy got up and I got in the bed and it smelled like beer and tobacco and onions, I'd curl my legs up inside my nightgown, and put my hand up aside of my face and whisper, "I love you, Scotty."

## Reflections

Sue Geringer

EVERY summer that I can remember has included trips to the lake. This place is far removed from the bustle and business of the modern city. The pace is slower, more relaxed, even static at times. But this external calm allows the imagination to take over. One takes note of little things and becomes involved in a more subtle activity—the rhythm of earth and sky, sun and moon, water and weather.

Early on a morning the rising sun casts tremendous shadows onto the lake, shadows etched by the trees lining the high banks. The lake is calm and peaceful, the atmosphere is fresh, and soft breezes rustle around in the treetops and play over the water. As the sun climbs, the deep blue of the sky is bleached to a lighter shade; and the shadows shorten until the sun is directly overhead. It is suspended over the water, breaking up the surface into bits of glitter. The air becomes hotter and heavier, and the insects in the woods are furiously sawing with a coarse buzz. The breezes have retreated to the shore where they shuffle about the foliage.

After a time the sun gives up its lofty perch and begins its